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ABSTRACT

Although a Ph.D. candidate feels pressured to take sides in the discursive war in academe between social-epistemics and expressionists, he finds it difficult to do so. W. Ross Winterowd, a "spokesperson" for social-epistemic rhetoric, makes distinctions between the two camps, maintaining a discursive dichotomy between what he calls the New Rhetoricians or collectivist rhetoricians and the Romantic Idealists or individualist rhetoricians, like Donald Murray, Ken Macrorie, and Peter Elbow. In Winterowd's view, Romantics view writing as "making" something, while New Rhetoricians see writing as "doing" something. "Doing" implies that communication and community are more central, since "convincing, elating, informing" are actions directed toward an audience. Winterowd faults the Romantics for their individualistic orientation, their investment in truth and honesty apart from human community, and their solipsism. Feminist readings, however, suggest that these two camps need not necessarily be opposed. Feminists argue that men have historically oppressed women by purifying male interests, considering male interests "transcendent," while female interests are "silly" or "impure" because they are myopic. Winterowd's desire to theorize rhetoric is also the desire to purify, to avoid being polluted by the "messy" expressionists. Feminists assert that social and individual worlds are inextricably bound--thus, they use personal writing to serve as an avenue for inquiry into the ideological constructs of self in relation to other. This ideology suggests that the two rhetorics can be seen as continuous rather than opposed. (Contains 20 references.) (NKA)

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Positioning Personal Discourse Professionally

As a Ph.D. candidate nearing the end of his requirements, I feel pressure to place myself professionally, to take a side in the discursive war, with all its dichotomous trappings, between social-epistemics and expressionists. I hunger for the particularities of personal writing, the concrete nuances that complicate, the intimate stories that make us human, that create connection and disparity. But I also find the prospect of relinquishing the critical power of social epistemic rhetoric difficult. Greedily, I want both.

But I am told the two are at odds. W. Ross Winterowd, who James Berlin identifies as a spokesperson for social-epistemic rhetoric over the years (488), makes distinctions in "A Philosophy of Composition" between the two camps, maintaining a discursive dichotomy between what Winterowd calls the New Rhetoricians or collectivist rhetoricians, people like himself, and the Romantic Idealists or individualist rhetoricians, people like Donald Murray, Ken Macrorie, and Peter Elbow. In Winterowd's view, Romantics view writing as making something, New Rhetoricians as doing something (convincing, amusing, informing) (340). "Doing" implies that communication and community are more

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central in the latter camp, since "convincing, elating, informing" are actions directed toward an audience. For Romantics the writing process is open-ended, chaotic, for New Rhetoricians it is directed (341); Romantics devalue craft in favor of sincerity or truth, voice, originality, while New Rhetoricians take pleasure in well-crafted writing (341); Romantics value individual autonomy, New Rhetoricians community (344); and so on. Winterowd faults the Romantics for their individualistic orientation, their investment in truth and honesty apart from human community, their Romantic solipsism, resulting "in part, at least, from a sense that the composing process is essentially mysterious and unamenable to either explanation or instruction--and even more, that attempting to explain any aspect of this mystery is building a fire in a wooden stove" (345).

The feminist readings I have done, spurred by an eleven year relationship with a feminist, have suggested to me that these two camps need not be necessarily opposed, that Winterowd's critical denigration of expressionist rhetoric is a dichotomous act of purification we need not be bound by. Feminists argue that men have historically oppressed women by purifying male interests, which is to say that their interests are the "transcendent" ones, the "higher" ones, the "pure" ones, while the interests of women are "silly," or "impure," or "wrong" because they are myopic. Genevieve Lloyd writes that rational knowledge, affiliated with 'male' culture, "has been constructed as a transcending,

transformation or control of natural forces; and the feminine has been associated with what rational knowledge transcends, dominates or simply leaves behind" (2). This process of purification to "Reason" is part of the attempt by men to preserve a power order that favors them, and keeps women from the processes of defining and expressing their own interests, experiences, and knowledge so that instead they will serve the interests of those above them.

And, of course, the university isn't free of this purifying process. Bruce Wilshire describes purification in academia as "the refusal to mix a stance with other views (and evidence) which are palpably relevant to it. Mary Daly calls it methodolatry. Each field's formalism defines and guards its boundaries" (161). Winterowd himself writes about the act of purification in "The Purification of Literature and Rhetoric." He argues that in the 1940s literary studies "were purified to theory, and rhetoric was purified of theory" (257) by literary theorists, thus reducing composition and rhetoric to the teaching of grammatical "correctness" and style--or composition. This removed composition and rhetoric from the arena of knowledge production, and placed literary theorists in a position of legitimate stature over the field, given that the most valued function of academic disciplines is research and theory. Winterowd cites J. Hillis Miller's "Composition and Decomposition: Deconstruction and the Teaching of Writing," as a contemporary reduction of composition and rhetoric to style by a

literary theorist. Miller writes that in composition,

The emphasis can happily be on praxis as opposed to theoria. Such theory as there is is immediately testable in practice. The discipline is required to appropriate only as much theory as it needs and as works, while ideas can fairly easily and quickly be shown not to work and can be hooted out of court.

(1983, p. 38)

As Winterowd observes, Miller suggests that the only theory to exist in composition is utilitarian and quantifiable, and kept to a minimum (265).

Yet Winterowd, in "A Philosophy of Composition," turns around and attempts to purify the New Rhetorics of expressionist rhetoric, which he implies is mystical and therefore lacking an emphasis on theory. Winterowd's desire to bring theory back to rhetoric is also the desire to purify, to avoid being polluted by the messy, sloppy, romantic expressionists, like Macrorie, Coles, Elbow, and Murray, who advocate the freedom of the individual and personal written expression. This is to say that because Winterowd's New Rhetoric movement is, in part, a reaction against the expressionistic movement's overvaluing the individual at the expense of the social, it flip-flops and does the exact opposite to make itself distinct from the expressionists. Linda Alcoff believes that such a "rejection of subjectivity, unintentionally but nevertheless, colludes with [the] 'generic human' thesis of classical liberal thought that particularities of individuals are

irrelevant and improper influences on knowledge" (420).

Feminists assert that social and individual worlds are inextricably bound. Thus, they use personal writing, not to turn "away from the relation of the individual to the social world" (Faigley 531), as expressionists are often accused of doing, but to serve as an avenue for "inquiry into the ideological constructs of self in relation to other" (Lassner 230). Shirley K. Rose, Joy S. Ritchie, Diana J. Fuss, Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater, Lillian Bridwell-Bowles, Carole Deletiner, Marilyn M. Cooper, Louise M. Rosenblatt, Oliva Frey, and Nancy Miller all examine "the interrelation-ship between the personal, political, and theoretical" (Ritchie 271) as they relate to gender politics, literacy, discourse, and writing pedagogy. Such ideology suggests that while it is important to ask the larger social and cultural questions to understand and challenge oppressive societal structures, inquiries at the level of the individual can serve the important, immediately pragmatic function of helping us to recognize how the broader social, "public" context has informed our personal "lived" histories, our ways of being in everyday life.

This interrelatedness suggests that we see the two rhetorics as continuous, rather than opposed. Expressionistic rhetoricians, for instance, can move in the direction of recognizing ideology and the social. Consider a female student's expressive writing from Ken Macrorie's Uptaught, written when her significant other left for Vietnam:

We have known for a long time that he would have to go, but I refused to really think about it. Now every news story and photograph of the war that I've seen flashes through my mind. The torture of prisoners, the weekly count of casualties, the hopelessness of jungle fighting. If I believed in this war, it wouldn't be as hard to bear. (101)

What's lacking in the passage--from the perspective of a social-epistemic--is an awareness and critique of the social forces and structuring processes that legitimate war. In other words, the writer focuses on her personal connection with the "how" of war--how her significant other might be tortured, wounded, or killed--and not the "why" of war--why her significant other might be killed, whose interests it would serve, and so on. She might wonder, for instance, why war is almost wholly a male activity, or why the United States government feels justified in using violence to make the world safe for democracy. The student's personal connection to the war is potentially reason for her to go on and explore the larger social implications associated with the goals of social-epistemic rhetoric.

If social-epistemic rhetoricians are really interested in community and collective action, doesn't this continuum make sense? Isn't it inclusive rather than exclusive? Pressured to choose expressionist or social-epistemic rhetoric, I balk. To put myself in one camp removes me from the strengths and offerings of the other. I can't choose. Or better yet: I won't.

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